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MILTON BLAKE, SUNSCREEN PIONEER





The article by Drissi et al¹ provides a welcome description of key figures and milestones in the history of sunscreen development. However, as a medical practitioner from Australia, I feel obliged to point out an important oversight in the paper. Milton Blake, an Australian chemist, has been credited by several

sources^{2,3} as one of the pioneers of sunscreen development in the early 20th century, yet he is not mentioned in the article by Drissi and colleagues. It is therefore worth briefly describing for *Proceedings* readers Blake's contribution to sunscreen development, which Blake achieved with limited resources.

Blake graduated from the University of Adelaide, South Australia, in 1923 with a bachelor of science degree.⁴ In the late 1920s, spurred by a German article he had read regarding an organic compound that had the potential to absorb ultraviolet rays, Blake conducted experiments in the Adelaide boarding house where he was residing to incorporate the compound (phenyl salicylate) into a topical cream formulation.⁵ Blake's "laboratory" was his bedroom, and his equipment, comprising "a kerosene room heater, saucepans for containers and a pair of old-fashioned hand scales,"⁵ could be described as rudimentary at best. After several unsuccessful trials, Blake eventually produced a "sunburn preventative cream."⁶ Professor Kerr Grant, an eminent physicist at Blake's alma mater, then conducted further tests on the cream and confirmed that it provided ultraviolet shielding.⁵ In the early 1930s, Blake started to produce large quantities of his sunscreen for commercial purposes, and in 1932 he established the company Hamilton Laboratories, which

proceeded to make a range of sun protection and skin care products over the ensuing decades.⁶ The name “Hamilton” was derived from Blake’s preferred signature line—“H. A. Milton”—in official documents. Blake’s innovative efforts comfortably stand alongside those of other pioneers of sunscreen development, such as Eugene Schueler, Franz Greiter, and Benjamin Green, who are mentioned in the paper by Drissi et al.

Blake was undoubtedly the major Australian figure in the early years (1920s and 1930s) of sunscreen development, but it is worth noting that he was not the only Australian researcher in the field in that era. In the 1930s, an unnamed dermatologist affiliated with the Queensland Radium Institute in the Australian state of Queensland made a 10% dispersion of phenyl salicylate in paraffin for use as a sunscreen in the institute’s cancer patients.⁷ Apart from the omission of Blake, the article by Drissi et al provides an excellent overview of the history of sunscreen, with due recognition of sunscreen pioneers.

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